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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the author's interpretation of the Freudian concept of penis envy. Penis envy is viewed as a psychological phenomenon rather than a biological phenomenon characterized as the "bedrock of feminity." Based on his experiences as a psychoanalyst, the author states that penis envy involves the child's early identifications with the mother, the resolution of the oedipal conflict, and that which is unresolved in the oedipal conflict. The concepts of internalization and object representation lead to a modified understanding of psychosexual development in both sexes. How much a child is loved by the mother at each stage of development basically determines the extent of love of self in later life. This concept is neglected in Freud's work with the early mother/child relationship. The author praises the feminist movement for its negation of the concept of gender superiority and suggests psychoanalysis as a means for personal growth and discovery. (HLM)

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A Freudian Looks at Freud and Femininity

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Psychoanalysis is the science of the unconscious mind. We learn about its functioning through free associations, slips of the tongue and pen, dreams, and transference reactions in treatment. The impact of culture (if we take culture to mean the immediate family) on the unconscious mind is profound. The impact of culture in the broader sense is delayed until its impact is experienced by the family and then transmitted to the next generation. Thus there is a time lag. To speak of the impact of the Feminist Movement on psychoanalysis is to say that it is too soon to know what impact it has. As a social and political movement that could change the structure of the family--that may move us from the patriarchal order of things--then it would be interesting to see how the changes would be reflected in personality. What changes in the roles of Mother and Father will influence the oedipal conflict and its resolutions remains to be seen. We have never known of the overthrow of patriarchy but perhaps feminism will move us in that direction.

The truths we learn about via the psychoanalytic method have always been difficult for the general public to accept. The criticisms and attacks on Freudian thought by medicine in the early days was part of the human tendenc, to maintain repression of infantile sexual impulses particularly the oedipal desires. Freud's courage in the face of these attacks is legendary. As an analyst identified with Freud and the Freudian tradition I have often had to become the defender in debates. However, in the area of female sexuality and the development of femininity I have had a different kind of experience. I have become slowly aware that something was wrong with some basic propositions that I always took for granted. A few years ago I was a last minute replacement on a panel dealing with male female differences. The speaker I replaced had planned to discuss Kate Millet's book and was reacting to her militant posture as though it were more heat than light and was a political treatise rather than a thoughtful questioning of what constitutes feminine development. During a ten minute break between patients two hours before the program began I scanned my library for

references to support the basic proposition that there were differences between male and female and to answer the question--what were the nature of those differences. I recall Lionel Tiger's work in supporting the biological difference where he reported that the testosterone change that took place at puberty was an increase of 30 times as much in the male and 3 times as much in the female. This was in support of the notion that aggressiveness was a male characteristic and passivity was a female characteristic. The book that I chose from the shelf was Helene Deutsch Psychology of Women. I jotted down a quote namely, "The origin of masochism and passivity are intimately connected. They are both the outcome of the feminine constitution...." The personal reactions of the female psychologists in the audience was hostile. I assumed, with Freud, that what I was talking about was unknown to them due to repression and I would simply ignore their distress. Could it be that they simply refused to recognize their nature? However, I became uncomfortable with myself at this time and instead of leaning on the authorities for the 'word' I began to take stock of my own work. The whole notion of the activity-passivity polarity was no longer clear in my mind. This is what Roy Schafer[1] in 1973 called the problem of "naming". Once things are named they have a tendency to become fixed thus active-aggressive masculine have become synonomous in analytic writing as has passive-receptive-masochistic-feminine become equated. Thus, Helen Deutsch[2] said "The whole attitude of these women toward life may be very active and masculine and they may display particular resistance and aggression in the struggle for life. Sometimes this masculine attitude ....etc." (pg. 247) This kind of thinking has interferred with our understanding of what is masculine and what is feminine. Differences in biology and psychology certainly exist but to use the prototype of sexual intercourse as the male is active and thrusting and the female is passive and receptive is ludicrous. Sex is an act requiring

activity on both parts and the labeling of the female as passive (which is also synonomous with weak and ineffective) is essentially insulting. At least it has become so through the labeling process plus the sexist bias to protect the male. This problem disturbed my complacency regarding femininity and some rethinking was in order.

I had been teaching a course entitled, "The Psychoanalytic Theory of Personality" at the New York Center for Psychoanalytic Training and the women in my course were very encouraging to me as we reviewed the literature and discussed female sexuality. We read Mary Jane Sherfey and I became convinced that her point that the myth of Eve from Adam's rib was reversed based on her embryological information that first comes a female matrix from which emerges later either a male or female was equally propagandistic and did no justice to the data. It seemed like simply an attempt to reverse the myth and myth making is the work of journalists not scientists.

At the same time I reevaluated what I had learned clinically and realized that "penis envy" was not the "bedrock of feminine development" as Freud had taught us. It was always present in all my female patients in more or less degree but the data was always contaminated! I never found penis envy in an isolated state. It was always connected intimately with Mother's attitude toward girls, Father's attitude toward girls, the Mother-daughter relationship from infancy on and the Father-Mother relationship. Today we speak of Psychoanalysis as Psychoanalytic Development Psychology which takes in the work of Hartmann, Spitz, Mahler, Jacobson (The Ego Psychologists) and recognizes as crucial the Theory of Object Relations. In brief, this means that <u>Internalization</u> (the making part of oneself that which was once external) and object representation (increasing internalization of the impact of early objects) have modified our understanding of psychosexual development in both sexes. Thus, how the little girl was loved by Mother at each stage of development would basically determine how she loved

herself in later life. What Freud underestimated was the effect of the early Mother-child interaction as each developmental phase was lived through. We see this most dramatically in the transference where the male analyst is related to in ways that repeated the early dyad or in ways that idealized the analyst as an ideal mother--clearly pre-oedipal modes of relating. The early identification with Mother a truly psychological phenomenon--which predates the oedipal period is crucial for the fate of the developing femininenes of the girl. Likewise, during the oedipal period the father's loving involvement with his daughter enhances her femininity. When I would come upon dream material and associations which led to recognition of feelings of penis envy....I was surprised to repeatedly discover that this soon gave way to associations and memories related to maternal deprivation and maternal rejection. It was enticing to me to assume that the deprivation was an expression of Mother's depriving my patient of the penis so that talking of that which was missing was a way of saying that Mother did not provide the missing organ. This never developed into any feeling of conviction for either myself or my patient. The deprivation related to real distance between Mother and daughter and not fantasies of rejection...and the thing that was really missing was mother's <u>love</u> and not the penis. "She would have loved me if I'd been a boy" was a stronger root for the penis envy than was the awareness of being different from males and wanting the organ that made the difference. In fact, differences arouse envy in people who do feel deprived. The wish for breasts is present in both little boys and little girls.

Therefore my data led me to conclude that penis envy was never the bedrock of feminine development. This sounds a bit like re-inventing the wheel... One is instructed by one's patients and we don't impose theoretical premises upon anyone. A patient's history and lifting of repressions will tell us what we need to know. The Jones-Freud controversy within psychoanalysis reverberated

around this very issue. Ernest Jones, Freud's disciple and biographer took issue with him on the same point that I take issue with him. Horney led the way when she stated, "Male chauvinism is responsible for the unquestioned assumption that women feel their genitals to be inferior." Helene Deutsch' writings are filled with moralizing about what women should and should not be. She joined the controversy as a defender of the faith. Juliet Mitchell[3] writes, "To Jones and Horney there is an innate biological predisposition to femininity which expresses itself in females (and is only secondarily disturbed by society). The woman and the man are created in nature. To Freud--society demands of the psychological bisexuality of both sexes that one sex attain a preponderence of femininity; the other of masculinity; man and woman are made in culture."

So to Freud, femininity was a psychological phenomena based on identifications. To Jones, it was a biological phenomena. Schafer argues that Freud leaned too heavily on the phallic phase for accounting for woman's personality characteristics. He states that the experience in human relationship emphasizes aims and objects whereas biology provides the stimuli. Thus the theory of psychosexual development is not a biological all or nothing theory. Rather, as the phases unfold, the interaction process at each stage of development is crucial for the developing personality. Freud stated in 1931 that he understood less about female development than male development.

A woman came to see me for analysis many years ago after she had checked me out. She wanted to know was I going to stop her from getting an advanced degree with some pressure about traditional roles etc.? Was I going to encourage her to be a wife and mother in some traditional terms? What allowed her entry into my office was her knowledge from APA Directory that my wife had a Ph.D. and professional affiliations. Thus she dared risk the possibility that I might respect her autonomy. The analysis was begun at the same time that she brought her 5 year old son back into her home. He had thus far been raised by a loving

family while she pursued her career goals. The assumption of motherhood psychologically prompted the need for analysis. She needed help to learn of her identifications and her unconscious hostility towards her mother. She was frightened of any tender loving feelings and expected to be criticized and condemned for anything other than a controlling attitude towards males. Her mother was a bitter, depressed, obese woman who saw marriage as enslavement. Her notion of a good marriage was one in which the woman managed and controlled the man. Her depression prevented any tenderness toward her daughter.

The beginning transference was an idealized one in which I was truly a magnificent, bountiful, loving person. The counter-transference was a full belief in my magnificence. We enjoyed what might best be called an analytic symbiotic phase in which early ego damage was under repair. My summer vacation was a difficult separation for her to endure. She dreamt she was at war, but safely ensconced in a pill-box shelter with a month's supply of food to hold out against the enemy. This dream brought to the surface hostile feelings about separation and early memories of maternal rejection. The penis envy emerged as a defensive structure against permitting herself to be loved by me. In the transference, the origin of this was over determined. That is, if she identified with Father she protected herself from her oedipal wishes toward Father and at the same time she would be loved by Mother who devalued femaleness. Learning about her Mother in the safety of the analytic relationship allowed her to experience the hostility toward her Mother that had been repressed and permitted her to discover tenderness within herself. She had a second child at the end of the analysis, a lovely little daughter whom she was able to mother right from the outset. Likewise she received her advanced degree and is a professional person. Let me reiterate though for those who believe I encouraged her to be either a mother or a professional. I did neither. She was able to separate from her mother because her guilt over her hostility was dissipated and she was

able to develop loving sexual feelings for me which permitted her to confront her oedipal desires. The penis envy had been there as a defense against these feelings but was no longer necessary. She left analysis feeling better about herself and capable of enjoying being a woman.

Another patient didn't have such a favorable outcome. A secretary to a psychiatrist used to conduct pre-therapy sessions in the waiting room with all the patients. She talked to them and with them and they loved it. She felt an important part of the team. She suffered stomach distress and her employer referred her to me. It was a stormy experience. The couch was a symbol of submission to me and therapy and she could never permit herself more than a half an hour on the couch without turning around, sitting up, getting an ash tray etc. We were colleagues discussing her case, therefore the patient on the couch had no status. She had three brothers and was the only girl in a Jewish family that honored its males and denigrated its females. Her envy of her brothers was strong. One day she reported a dream of going into a butcher shop, ordering some meat, and seeing the butcher accidentally slice off his finger as he prepared her order. I asked her later for any associations to the finger and she blurted out, "Nothing!" After her protest she confessed that the finger was her only means of sexual satisfaction and that intercourse didn't interest her. Her wishes to castrate me were clear but she was unreceptive to any such comment from me. In fact she soon terminated in response to my impending summer vacation. That is, I was taking off August so she took off July and that was that. I think it is no mere coincidence that the two cases I chose to briefly discuss had problems around separation. It is precisely because I find the pre-oedipal problems are much more powerful determinants than the later phallic problems. In this case, I believe she experienced my leaving as traumatic, retaliated, and rejected me in turn. The dependency problems were undoubtedly responsible for the stomach distress and was defended against by her competitiveness. Thus the

penis envy that appeared on the surface was a defensive structure. She was an excellent office manager and a chance meeting a few years later I learned that she was now manager of her husband's business.

A note on the countertransference problems....the intense early mother child transferences I encounter daily in my practice can be upsetting. The demand for mothering places a special burden on the analyst. One must be at home with one's own wishes to be mothered and particularly for a male not to find this threatening to his masculinity.

A rereading of Helenes Deutsch has given me an appreciation of her great understanding of the part played by the parents in influencing the child in her development as a female but she loses credibility when she names or labels active as masculine, etc. To talk of the orgasm as a passive-receptive oceanic experience is not to have experienced it.

Thus I know of penis envy as a phenomena. I say it is purely a psychological phenomena and not biological and not the bedrock of femininity. It is much more complicated and involves identifications with the early mother, resolution of the oedipal conflict, defenses in the aspect of what is not resolved in the oedipal conflict. Gender identity is not something in which one gender is superior and another inferior. The feminist movement has called to task the social oppression by males of females. It has raised my personal consciousness and disturbed my complacency. It has made me aware of the neglect of early mother child theorizing in Freud's work. Psychoanalysis is not a social program. It does not ask of its subjects that they adapt submissively to the environment as is so often said of it. It can only help one to know oneself and the process of discovery is an exciting journey of growing.

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